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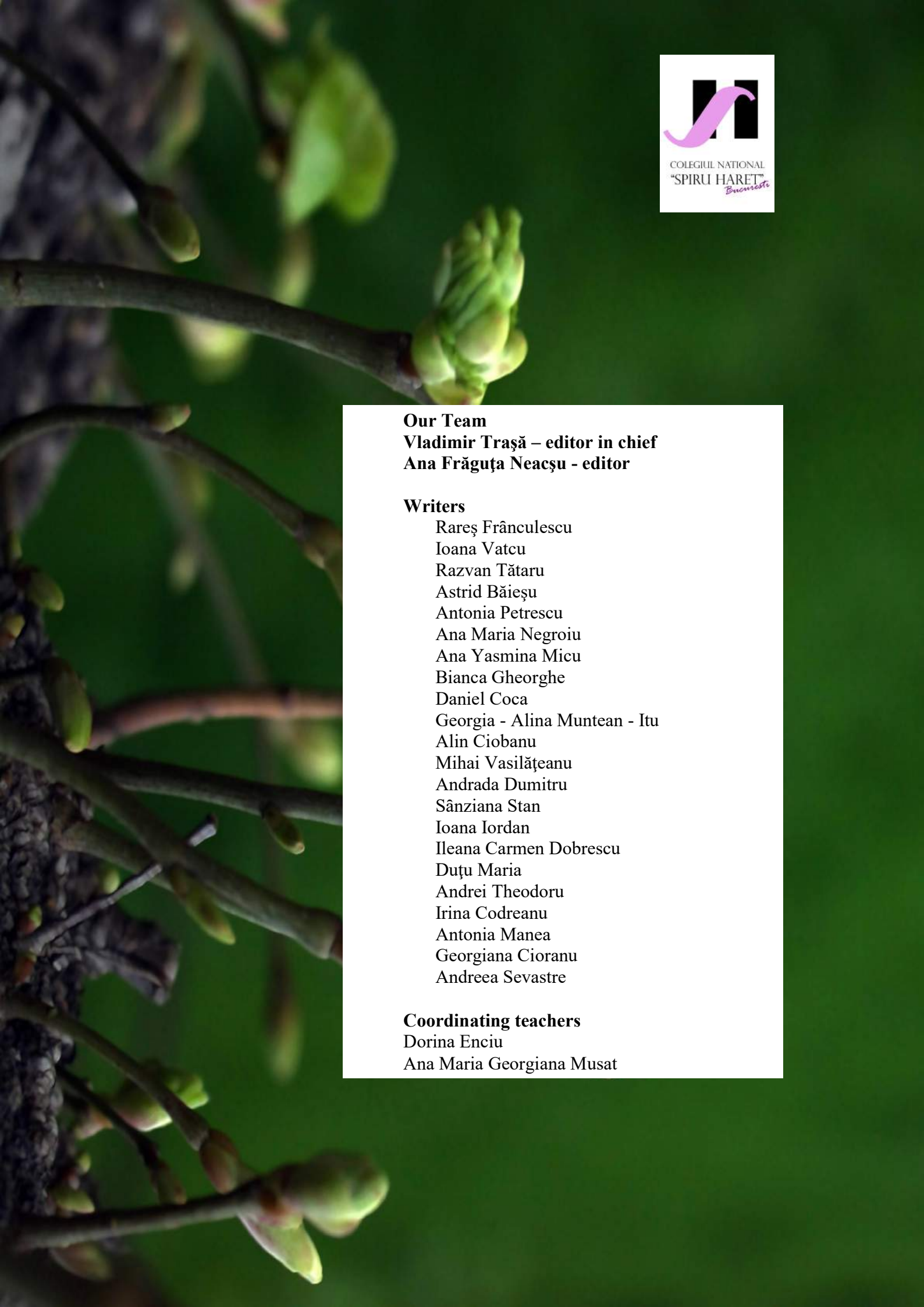
Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.

- Margaret Mead

Colegiul National "Spiru Haret" Bucuresti



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Our Olympics Finalists

Interviewed by Ioana Vatcu, Răzvan Tătaru, X F

Here they are! Two of our finalists in the *English Olympics' National Contest*, *Răduţă Maria* from 9C and *Talchiu Melisa* from 9G.

The national level was held two weeks ago in Constanta. They had a really good time interacting with other students from all over the country, they have had very good results throughout the phases of this competition and have agreed to participate in this interview and share their experience with us. We tried to cover as many interesting details as we could, but also capture the essential.

Maria

How did your passion for English start?

"Well, I actually only started studying English in 4th grade - I had only studied German in primary school, but mom wanted me to get into the Intensive English class - and it was REALLY DIFFICULT. My tutor was kind of scary, and the study sessions were long and exhausting, but she was very talented and I found myself catching up with those who had studied the language since 1st grade; she made me actually eager to learn, and then it just kind of snowballed from there." – Maria

"My passion for English doesn't have a proper beginning, it sort of came naturally. I started studying English as a kid and I liked the way it sounded. So, I figured that knowing English was one of my goals. I think that my mother might have something to do with this goal of mine since it descends from her life goal of mastering foreign languages." - Melisa

How did you prepare? Was it difficult to qualify for the national level? What did you feel when you saw the result?

"Honestly….I didn't really prepare that much. I tried to practice for the speaking test, it's my weakest point for sure, but I figured, if I don't know it at this point, I probably can't learn it in a week. Was it difficult…I would say not really? But I honestly wasn't expecting to qualify AT ALL. I thought the speaking test would greatly lower my score, but hey, I got 99 points! Who would've guessed. As for the results - not gonna lie, I felt quite disappointed I didn't win anything, but I wasn't actually expecting to. Well, I've still got 3 more chances!" - Maria

"Honestly, qualifying for the National level wasn't as difficult as it might sound. Sure, preparation had to be done both physically, by exercising my grammar, my vocabulary and my public speaking skills, as well as mentally, by trying to overcome the pressure and fear which come with such a contest like this. It took time, focus and patience, but I had the support of my teacher, Mrs Nicole Stanescu and my family. And it was all worth it. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the result, I was thrilled." - Melisa

Was it difficult to travel or did you enjoy this part of the experience?

"I...can't say I've got a particularly strong opinion on all that. Before the tests, I was trying to keep myself from spiraling into a pit of anxiety and couldn't focus on anything else, and after they were done, I was exhausted and wanted to go home. The accommodation was pretty much as I expected, and the only real problem was the bathroom being in the hallway, which I wasn't used to." - Maria

"Travelling wasn't difficult at all since I'm used to it. And to be honest, it was one of my favourite parts of the contest." - Melisa

What were the people you met like?

"The people were the best part!! I got to meet a bunch of kids my age who shared the same passion for English I have, and with whom I could easily communicate (everyone else always complains I mix Romanian and English too much). My roommates were all friendly and pleasant to be around, and I experienced a sense of group bonding surprisingly early into the trip." - Maria

"With the final round of the contest I got the chance to meet people from all over the country. I expected them to be arrogant, full of themselves for getting to the final round and greedy to win the contest.
. But I was wrong and there is only one word to describe the people I met: WONDERFUL. I made new friends, from all over Romania with whom I still keep in touch. It was extraordinary." - Melisa

How do you feel about your result? What was most difficult?
"I'm alright with it I suppose; I'm definitely aiming to do better next year, but I'm pleased enough with the score I got right now. The most difficult part for me was, as I've mentioned a few times before, the speaking exam. It's not that I can't get my ideas in order or that my pronunciation is clumsy, but having everyone's attention focused on me - in any situation - is as far from my comfort zone as it gets." - Maria

"The most difficult thing was the sensation before a trial. The waiting was absolutely awful, but once I saw the task everything was better. I'm okay with the result although I can't say that I'm fully pleased by it, knowing that it was a matter of attention. If I had been more careful, I would have done better. But it was an experience and a lesson for the future." - Melisa

What did you learn from this experience? If you were to go through it again, what would you change?
"I don't think I'd really change anything - I feel like everything went alright. Though, I learnt that I should definitely bring a phone charger that you can plug multiple wires into. And, also, it's not as bad as you think it's gonna be, I guess. It did give me better insight as to how things work regarding national levels of contests, though so I'll be more emotionally prepared next year." - Maria

Melisa

"By all means, this experience was full of lessons. First of all, referring to the proper exam, I learned that I have to pay more attention and, to answer the second question, that is what I would change if I were to go through it again. On the other hand, talking about the experience, I learned what it's like to live at a boarding school, having roommates with whom you have to share a living. It is not as bad as it sounds, trust me." - Melisa

What advice would you give to someone who aims at such a high performance?
"Y'know, follow your dreams, never stop believing in yourself, all that (but do work hard though). Just do your best, and try again and again, until you get the results you want, that's how life works usually. Oh, and read a lot in English. It helps tons, believe me." - Maria

"Never give up. Although it might sound like a cliché, this piece of advice got me to the final round of the Olympics. So that is my answer. If you fall, get up. If you fail, get back on track. Try until you succeed. But never ever give up!" - Melisa

The robotics club

Rareş Frânculescu, XI D

This year, from March 23rd to the 25th, the school's robotics team took part, for the second time, in the *BRD First Tech Challenge Romania* competition, where 91 more teams from the whole country participated. The competition, very popular in the United States, was introduced in our country last year, making it the same age as our club, which, this year, formed a finalist alliance and won the third prize in the "Motivate Award" category. Our team was coordinated by Mrs Petronia Dumitrescu, Vice-principal.

The teams needed to prove their skills in:

- construction of a robot that is to enter matches with a certain theme;
- finding sponsorship for the team, as the costs involved rise to thousands of euros;
- making of a business plan;
- popularizing the project into community.

So the project is one of great complexity, as it develops engineering, programming and entrepreneurial skills. Our high school's team is made up of 15 members and many volunteers.

After the contest, three members of the robotics club have been interviewed: Octavian Dragomir, the team captain, Ana Pãlãlaie, the head of the media department, and Alin Zlotea, the chief of the programming department. One by one, they sat on the armchair in front of me, turned toward the lonely window, their bright-eyed faces expecting my questions to reflect in the walls of the poorly lit room.

Question: Why did you take up this project?

Octavian: I signed up because of two reasons: on one hand, I was sharing the enthusiasm for the team with the other members and, on the other hand, I wanted to be part of something greater than me: first, a team, then a community and lastly a grand scale competition.

Alin: I've been taking apart and putting together things since I was young, and the idea of a robotics team seemed interesting. I could surely be a part of it, as it was something I enjoy, it was all about engineering.

Ana: It was a fascinating idea. So challenging and totally unexpected, given the fact we are still in our high school days.

Question: How much time did you dedicate to the project?

Octavian: Such an activity requires very much free time and effort, especially in preparing for a competition. Dedication could mean sacrificing some pleasures or free time.

Alin: I spend 10 to 15 hours a day at the robotics workshop and so do my colleagues.

Octavian: Of course, there are also many enjoyable aspects, such as teamwork or the desire of every colleague of mine to become better and better and to get as far as possible.

Ana: The nicest things are the satisfaction you get for your work, but also the sense of comradeship among us.

Alin: I've always had something for the physical work and for building things, and that makes the effort made be much more enjoyable.

Question: How was the atmosphere there, at the competition?

Alin: The organization, the atmosphere and the teams were over the level of the past edition, it was obvious that the experience gained in the first year had left its mark. There, you get a fantastic feeling, due to the participating teams and the spectators, who came simply out of curiosity. I strongly believe that how I felt is close to what sports people experience.

Octavian: It is a very nice experience, every won match makes you feel closer to the next level and every loss improves our experience, a match that taught us all something or that made us realise the mistakes we'd made, which we repaired afterwards.

Question: How do you consider that robotics would help you in your personal and professional development?

Ana: Participating in this project made me learn some essential marketing techniques, being the chief over the media department of the team and, from an emotional point of view, I've learnt many things about teamwork and time management.

Alin: After two years, I've learnt to work in a team, to speak in front of people, but I've also learnt the importance that working step by step has. Among all these, I consider that, being part of this, I've become more responsible and mature. In addition to that, the club has given me many possibilities regarding university, especially because my goal is to study at the University of Polytechnics. Added to that, this opportunity made me develop some indispensable traits in the daily life of an adult.

Finally, Ana reminds that "all the teams have understood the fundamental value of BRD First Tech Challenge Romania: *Gracious Professionalism*, which translates to treating everyone met with due respect, understanding the fact that all of the participants worked very hard for this and developing in this way joint values, on an emotional and professional level".

Technology is all around us, a tireless assistant to everything we do. Tireless or perhaps sometimes tiresome?

THE UNSEEN FACET OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Ana Frăguţa Neacşu, XI F

I bet I can effortlessly count the number of people who do not have at least one social media account. Not only do we live in the Era of Technology, but we also live in the Era of Exposure, validation and strong controversies over it.

However, there is one very simple question most people do not ask themselves: Is social media actually that helpful? I am aware that it has become fashionable and somehow 'absolutely necessary' for some reason in today's society. But what about its purpose? Socializing and making friends? Definitely not, more like stalking people you secretly either hate or admire and showing yourself off in any way possible. We are literally advertising our own selves. And, just like in a shop or a market, burglars and criminals are unavoidable and put in danger the safety of the advertised products. I am talking about identity and data theft, fraud, crimes of opportunity and manipulation. Many social media sites are used by criminals. If you post that you are out of town on vacation, you've opened yourself up for burglary. If you mention that you're away on business for a weekend, you may leave your family open to assault or robbery. And this is just what an individual can make you go through, because these platforms are vulnerable to outside (or inside) attack.

Here is what goes on behind the social media wall: Have you ever noticed that once you search, a pair of shoes, for example, on Google, you suddenly receive lots of adverts and emails with shoe sales or websites which sell shoes? Well, if you have not observed these things you either did not pay enough attention or you are naive enough to believe that it's just pure coincidence. Some might say that this makes your search more efficient and easy. I can tell you that this is just the tip of the iceberg; it's so much more to it beneath the surface. There is no such thing as security or confidential settings on these accounts. Our data is constantly used to push us consume and buy anything from random objects like squishy anti stress toys to expensive gadgets we probably don't need. Besides this, we are permanently tracked down through our phones, we are being controlled and compelled to consume without reason and purpose. This isn't fair! I hope you are aware of the fact that this is far from helpful and 'social'. It is a means of manipulation and a clear invasion of privacy that we actually give our consent for, the second we create an account. I am sorry to burst your bubble, but it's the truth.

There is evidence of this provided in the biographic movie/documentary entitled 'Citizenfour' which shows Eduard Snowden, a young man who worked for the NSA (National Security Agency) as well as for the CIA and who risks his life by sharing top secret information about the data our social media profiles contain (including the messages we send and receive, in case you were wondering) and how they are used. If you haven't watched it, I strongly suggest you do and see for yourself the true face of the reality we so voluntarily and 'happily' live in.

The light switch

Vladimir Traşă, X G

I remember my father fidgeting with those times' gadgets since I was little. When the first laptops rolled out on the market in our country my father was the new proud owner of one. The new proud broke owner of one, but an owner nonetheless. Two weeks ago, as I went into my room I reached for the light switch. I stood in the doorway. I reached out for the light switch again. My hand was flat agains the wall looking for it. Nothing.

Of course, like any normal person, I turned on the flashlight from my phone to find out that there was indeed no light switch. As I handled this crisis, my dad stretched one of his arms around me, holding his phone, and with a simple tap he turned on the light. Magical right? He was very excited and who was I to smash his dreams, I smiled and said "Cool!". I am not really into new technology, not that it freightens me, but I think there is enough of it around us, and most of the people don't know what they can do wit the ones already available in every household. We didn't need lightbulbs connected to the phone but now there was no going back.

Cutting to the chase, they are pretty great. When you wake up the give out a soft warm light growing brighter as you advance to your morning routine. The thing is that we can't figure out how to make them turn themselves off later, so the comfort of having the lightbulbs that turn themselves on comes in exchange of the fact that you need to turn them off after by hand. Not a biggy. When you go to sleep and forgot to turn off your lights, you just reach for the phone, you don't have to get out of bed. If you are at the computeryou don't need to stand up to turn them off. You forgot them on after you left the house? If there is no one near the house they turn themselves off. What about that? At the moment the lightbulbs have just warm or white light, nothing else. At the moment. With just this you get pretty confused and tired after experiencing all the routines my father made for them to change colours, brightness... There is a new message from grandma? The lights flicker. Tommorow will rain? The light goes from warm to white and then to warm light again. My father wants to upgrade to the "RGB" edition, that means you can make them go any colour the soul wants. Any. Colour... Imagine the headaches.

There is a little tiny small problem that will drive you mad.

You never stop looking for the light switch.

4/4 for Friends

On the initiative of the American Embassy in Romania, meant to honour the activity of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., foremost promoter of human rights, the day of 4th April was dedicated to community and good deeds. The event was organised by American Councils Romania. So a group of six volunteers from Class XI F, form teacher Mrs Ioana Dumitru, decided to visit the children in the orthopaedic wards of the Marie Curie Paediatric Hospital in Bucharest. Although we had initially thought of it as a not so challenging activity, we found there more than we had expected, as incurable illnesses also affect the bone system.

Here are the thoughts the volunteers would like to share with you after this brief but meaningful visit.

Today was indeed an enlightening experience that I strongly believe will stay with me forever.

What came today as a confirmation for me was the fact that acts and not words are the real thing. When you do things yourself and you see some serious things for yourself you understand and incorporate them into your system of experiences and values. The children I interacted with simply left me speechless...they were so very optimistic and radiated light and positive energy despite their tragic health condition...and got me thinking: 'How shallow and stupid can people really be?' Those of us who are privileged enough to be healthy and have all our limbs and organs tend to take for granted what we have and aim for buying or appreciating materialistic things instead, such as mansions, expensive cars, designer clothing and the list goes on...And besides that, we let every little impediment literally tear us apart and affect us so much, when there is no big deal and it is actually something that we can solve because we are healthy, and if you are healthy you can do anything. People who have health problems can, as well. Stephen Hawking is the best example. They can, but it is harder for them then it is for a healthy person, because their horizons are slightly narrowed.

I truly hope people, including myself, will learn to love themselves, as well as others, and live their lives filled with gratitude.

Ana Frăguţa Neacşu

This day was an incredible one...I have witnessed things that I never thought I would've ever seen. The moments spent with the kids were amazing. Seeing that most of them, despite their struggles, still manage to put a smile on their face, gives me hope. Hope that they will get better and that their stories will motivate other people to do something for the other kids out there that are suffering...

One of the most exciting activities, that managed to keep the children captivated, was writing on balloons. They loved the fact that us, volunteers, would leave them personal notes on them, wishing them to get well. I think that was something that made a huge impact on them.

Even though our contribution wasn't that big, I am happy that we could do something for those beautiful kids. I, for one, am willing to do something on a bigger scale, something that will bring a revolution in our country's healthcare system and invest in the research of rare diseases.
Antonia Petrescu

The activity organised by American Councils, which I took part in, was literally devastating, but in a really good way. I never could understand why those little souls have to endure this kind of pain, but then I remembered someone told me once that God challenges only strong people who can always find the way to solve problems. So, I was delighted to bring happiness on their faces for a moment and to make them forget about their suffering. I met 3 beautiful girls who were 6, 7 and 12 years old. I had real fun spending time with them and they reminded me how lovely life is when you’re little. We coloured together, we drew and wrote on colourful balloons, we made soap bubbles, we stuck stickers and we listened to stories. I realised that we brought a smile even on their parents’ faces, so I think this activity was a break even for them and I believe that we achieved our goal just by making them all laugh. I took this as an opportunity which taught me something really important: be kind whenever possible. It is always possible!
Ana Maria Negroiu

Today was a big day for me. The experience of volunteering with my classmates in a hospital and working with kids of all ages and with health problems that even grown-ups could not endure was something that made me realize people should take their "problems" and try to find happiness from them, because being ill and in a hospital is a real problem, especially for children. So being able to bring joy among kids that are in pain, physically or mentally, also brought a smile on my face and the hope that one day, people will come to the conclusion that happiness comes from small things.

Ana Yasmina Micu

I learned a lot from this experience. Firstly, enjoy what you have in life, no matter how small. The children we visited today had many physical problems but despite that, they managed to find joy in anything around them along with their parents who were just as strong and bright. The warm response we got was really touching, seeing how the atmosphere changed from tense to cheerful in a matter of minutes. I also learned that a little act of kindness can make such a big difference and I don't think there's a single thing in this world more motivational than those smiles we saw today. It was a blessing to meet each and every one of the kids and I wish to spread this much optimism around me, everyday.

Astrid Băieşu

And a few thoughts about life and personal attitude.

Letter to my future self

Gheorghe Bianca, X G

Dear future self,

It's been a while! I know your life's probably hectic right now, so this won't be long. You know me, I worry a lot.

Firstly, if you're actually happy at this point in yourlife, I'm very proud of you! However, don't forget to be grateful for everything that made you into the person you are today. Thank your friends, if you still got any, call your parents, check on your brother and don't let negativity get to you. Take a deep breath and continue working hard for whatever it is that's making you feel accomplished at the moment. Don't stop believing in yourself.

However, if I know anything at all about you it's that you'll be opening this letter in times of doubt. Are you hesitating? Are you confused? Have you lost sight of hope and happiness? Been there, done that. Whatever you're going through, evenif it might seem like a neverending nightmare, I know you can pull through. You always do.

Anyway, perhaps it's less of a problem than you make it up to be. Picture it through a child's eyes! You always lose yourself in details. Have you forgotten, again, what matters and what doesn't? I bet you still enjoy the little things, so prioritise them and you'll be alright in no time!

You might feel alone, but I promise you're not. I'm always cheering for you, just remember where you've come from and to chase your own dreams.

Daniel-Gabriel Coca, X G

Dear future self,

You spent your whole childhood yearning to be an adult, impatiently waiting for the rite of passage that would grant you the maturity, respect, and validation you so desperately sought. But, the most important thing which you forgot was to cherish the most precious moments of your life: playing in the park alongside your friends, hugging your parents before saying “Good night” and walking towards your first day of school. Now that you are an adult, all you crave are the sweetly uninhibited memories of play and lack of responsibility that childhood granted you.

A question you should ask yourself is: “Did I really live, or I just existed?”. That is why, you should enjoy it all. Take life as it comes. Don’t stress about anything. You miss all the beauty when you are stressed. Spread your love and your positive energy to everyone, because all of us need it. Listen to your friends’ problems, without plotting your response in advance. The inexplicable sensation of true connection and understanding is the best feeling in the entire world. Money is just a number. It comes and it goes. Love is the true currency.

One last piece of advice : do not take anything for granted, be grateful for what you have and if you wish to accomplish more, you know the only way to do it is through hard work and passion.

In the end, we should all treasure the most beautiful gift which we could possibly receive: life, with everything it has in store for us.

Feel like someone's got to pay for your anger?

The Root of All Bullying

Vladimir Traşă, X G

Like many others, this topic has been debated over and over again. In the last couple of years talking about bullying has truly been a phenomenon, mostly thanks to TV channels and other news outlets, but pretty common in schools too. Now, when this word is so frequently heard, it is surprising how many people "didn't get the memo": not that they have not heard about it, they just didn't pay attention, or didn't grasp the essential part. Why they didn't understand is clear to me: if you call someone a bully, even if he is one, he won't realise it ; if you tell someone, from the bottom of your sincere heart, that he misses on a big chunk of brain cells when he acts like bully, he won't be able to understand what's so bad about being a little less heavy than others.

Everyone knew this from the beginning, that's why (at least as I saw it) the target audience weren't the ones that were the problem, but the parents and the people witnessing these acts of violence. What went wrong, what made people to fail in picking up on this is simply the "political correctness" (so dear to us in these times) and the terminology that comes with it. We didn't call these aggressors uneducated or people with a lack of empathy and reason, we called them bullies. It sounded like a trend: *these 'emo phase' have disappeared but now we are stuck with these bullies all of a sudden.* This combined with the fact that the term was used for a set so vast of actions that it became meaningless: "You told someone that he is annoying? Oh, dear, stop bullying other people." Ridiculous.

What these lines of text are about, even if it doesn't seem like it, is this: The cause of bullying is nothing else but a lack of common sense. As are a lot of things, just to name a few: dirty streets, governments all around the world, a lot of Facebook posts that (in my opinion) should be markers for who the intelligence agencies should *take care of* (but then again that's probably just me), Facebook, fake news, terrorism, nuclear missiles, toxic gas, those big black BMWs that drive around the city with their signal lights broken (Special Agents that are reading this, take note of this kind of cars… and keep an eye on the people so frustrated that they write about them in a school magazine, who knows what they become when they grow up)… I am getting ahead of myself, you get the point: This should be discussed: the lack of common sense, and what we need to do to change this.

Who's better and who are we to judge?

Astrid Băieşu, XI F

Sadly we hear about bullying more and more. It is clearly a problem, acknowledged by everyone …so, why is nobody fixing this? Is there no way to stop it from happening, and worse, from spreading?

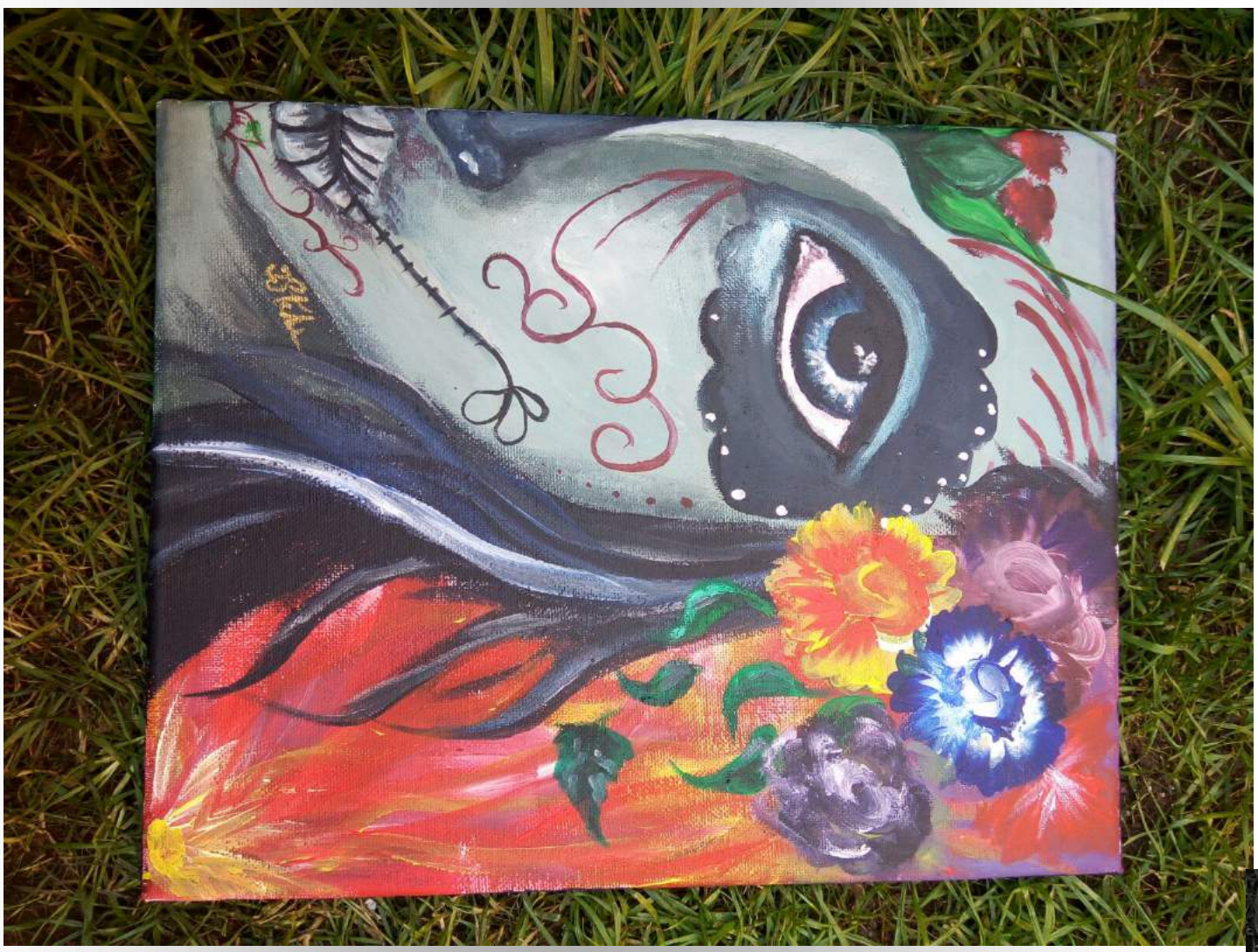
We live in the 21st century and somehow, being different still is a problem everywhere you go. In my opinion, we should cherish that, otherwise the Earth would become such a boring place to live in.

I am well informed of bullying that happens between children, some of them are angels, but others act as pure evil, that of course being the fault of their own parents. As we get older, we also get wiser and should, following a logical sentence path, stop with all this nonsense. Sadly, the bullying continues, for various reasons, in many diverse contexts.

I am here to talk about high-schools, a place for stress and competition all along with education and friendship. Let's take an example: the nerdy one in class gets good grades, is the teacher's favorite and the worst problem of them all, acts happy. How dare that person be joyful like that and not think about me who got a 4 in the same test? Healthy competition they say. Well, I cannot make that person somehow learn less to see how bad grades feel like, but I can make them feel bad in so many other ways, only for the sake of us being on equal footing, of course.

Another example. We're in high-school and there are rules that all the cool kids have to follow, duh. And those rules include everything, like how you should dress, how to act in certain situations, who to be friends with, where to hang out and what to do. Yes, you must follow those rules, they are very basic, but oh-ow, look at that kid who really doesn't do like the others, but he instead sees things in a completely different way. Even has one of those hobbies that we all agreed to hate…such a freak! I guess we'll keep that kid out of our group and pick on him every time he breaks one of the rules. It's only rational.

There are many other examples I could give but hope you got the idea. This is what happens in the schools we're in. What is the root of the problem? I'll tell you, it's simply one's way of thinking. What's the solution? Dig deep into our brains and next time we want to pick on someone, better have good reasons for it. What if you see it happening between some other people? Talk to the bully, conversation is key to EVERYTHING. I also want to mention that there isn't always a clear line between the ones being bullied and the ones doing it. The bully could actually suffer himself and think it's socially acceptable to make others feel the same. Those old philosophers sure did something right. They put forward a few ideas. Asking yourself questions before you do something stupid, thinking for yourself and most importantly, be human, we're all in the same boat.



the corpse symphony

Georgia - Alina Muntean - Itu, XII D

in this reality, as of late,
it always rains...
a constant downpour
rigid and cold to the skin,
that gives life and takes it away.
rivers of blood crash
against cavernous veins
and it rains!
a monotone rhythm
of splatters of
paint like blood on the walls;
in this body, as of late,
upon an unfortunate turn
of events
the clatter of bones
has become deafening-drowning out
the rest of the orchestra.
and at the centre
the core of the earth,
is a beating heart
never tired, never complaining-

the god instrument
that strums all the rest together,
ensuing a breathtaking harmony.

crumble this imaginarium
and unfold your dreams
in the marrow of your bones-
you're alone...
shattered and lost
in translation
words, and words, and white lies,
missing the point;
you are a guest in my psychosis
wondering around aimlessly
through the labyrinth
of my thoughts.

Moon priestess

Dumitru Andrada, XII D

I had seen many castles during my journeys, but none impressed me as much as the one which stood in front of me right now. It was a high lord's proud residence in the far south of the kingdom. Despite its old age, which was long forgotten, the fortress towered as noble as the lord's blood.

Four crenellated towers reached high into the clouds and on top of each of them stood a guard with a crossbow tightly squeezed between his hands. The walls were made from the best stone, carried all the way from the northern mountains of Frostshackle, here, into the warm, sunny country of Thunderclasp.

I urged my horse, an old mare, forward and as I got closer to the fort's moat I realized it was completely dry. "Must be the draught" I told myself. The drawbridge was already lowered and the heavy, silvery portcullis risen. There was a grand ceremony inside, and all kinds of folk had been invited to celebrate the birth of the lord's new son. From outside I could hear the cheering of the men, the laughter of young maidens, the raucous of the drunk and the sweet sound of merry violins playing. I myself had come as a bard, but my instrument was an old harp with lithe golden branches intertwined with the frame.

As I entered the majestic gate I noticed the lord's banner: a blue jay flying over a turquoise and green ocean, an orange sun above it. Every wall, inside and out, held a banner and was heavily decorated with the representative blue jay.

The stable boy quickly took my mare, right after I had unsaddled her and another boy took my harp. I swiftly checked my garments: they were no lady's gown, but they served well a lonesome bard. I swallowed a deep breath and with it my anxiety and entered the great hall which held the ceremony.

The first thing I noticed was the intense stench of alcohol: ale, mead and wine were pouring from every corner, thus the smell of the food being completely covered. I looked at the two rows of columns which lead to the noble people's table. At their plinths were a myriad of blue flowers, the colour of the blue jay's plumage.

Swiftly, I took my place with the other musicians and started playing and singing the merry tunes, but I hadn't come all the way south just to accompany the rest of the bards, but to sing to the newborn prince my famous ballad: "Moon priestess". It had become a superstition among the peasantry that if a lord's baby heard this song during its first years of life, he or she will be blessed by the moon goddess with great fortune, health and wisdom. Lately, even the lords started believing this. Of course, none of it was true, but I enjoyed my fame and respect as an artist. Soon enough it was time for my ballad to be sung and time for the goddess to bless the child.

The lord's young wife approached the platform where I was singing with the small baby that was sucking on his thumb. Her eyes were fixed on my deft fingers as I was playing the harp and she listened to every note and word I sang. In no time, all the guests started humming the ballad and the baby gave a big chuckle. His mom kissed his forehead gently with her bright red lips and continued listening.

In all my years of singing at weddings, name days, or other sort of festive gatherings in castles or inns, I had never received so much praise. By the end of "Moon priestess" the fair lady was already in tears. She thanked me sweetly and made sure I was fairly paid. That night I earned more than I ever imagined. Around 150 gold coins were clicking in my sachet. The lady was known for such generosity as she was extremely pious and did many benevolent deeds.

Now, it was time for me to leave. I bid everyone good night and good fortune, yoked my mare from the stable and galloped into the cold air of the night. Once again, I became a lonesome spirit which roamed the kingdom far and wide so that everyone could receive the blessing of the silvery moon which lighted my way as I was carried by the wind into the unknown...

What's in the news? The Journalism Department of the University of Bucharest

Dorina Enciu

As the "Different School" Week, or, as we called it, "School with a Difference", was planned earlier this year and we toured three universities, we felt it our duty to give readers a glimpse of what life appears to be like in one of these three places where you can get a very valuable degree.

Meeting point: the metal Lion opposite the Cotroceni Palace, on the grounds of visibility (it is actually a monument dedicated to the soldiers who perished in World War I and on whose sacrifice the union of Romania and Transylvania was built)

After waiting a few minutes for each other in the crisp November morning, a group of nearly frozen students and two teachers entered the former "Ștefan Gheorghiu" University, a sort of "red-brick" building where up until 1989 students got imbibed with the communist doctrine which they were supposed to spread onto the masses with the authority of the senior party agents they had chosen to become. At present, as we learned from Mr Valentin Vâlcu, Vice Dean, by whose kindness we visited the laboratories of the faculty, several departments of the University of Bucharest and the Polytechnics University share the space of this once awe-inspiring institution.

As the road to the top is never easy, we finally found ourselves at the Journalism Department, panting and gasping for breath after a six floor climb, and were warmly welcomed by Mr Vice Dean in person, who discreetly overlooked our hypoxia-induced dizziness and after instructing the porter to keep the doors wide open at all times (in case of fire hazard, I assumed) invited us in.

We journeyed along a narrow and dimly-lit corridor with rooms left and right, which we later discovered constituted the whole premises of the department. After a brief speech on the advent of journalism and marketing communication in the past few years we headed straight to the points of interest: the museum, the media room, a window on a staircase landing with, we were told, a splendid view of the Cotroceni Palace and the news/talk-show studio.

Now the museum consisted of an old mechanical typewriter, an age-ridden video editing workstation and a few other smallish items strewn on the shelves of a cabinet. Out of the landing window the Cotroceni Palace was shrouded in a sullen mist. We went on to the media room, which looked none too different from one of our classrooms. Desks, a video projector with a screen, dark blue vertical blinds. Senior year undergraduates were presenting projects: commercial clips. There was a bit of tension in the air, and then we understood: final exams loomed ahead.

The pinnacle of our tour was undeniably the news (Did anyone say fake news? Bite your tongue!) studio. While one of the members of the faculty, a nice gentleman who, we guessed, would have felt much more at ease behind a camera, was discussing what it takes to be a good journalist, an idea somehow sprang up from our group that many of the guests in shows, media celebs, as they are commonly known, were actually people of no great intellectual calibre, or, if truth be said, even poorly educated individuals, and how come they were so heavily promoted? "When does the DNA come in?" a voice said. "The CNA, you mean", faltered the professor. Luckily Mr Vice Dean, who had caught up with us, settled the dispute. "It's all about rating and share", he said, "The audience rules. We give viewers what they ask for". His colleague set the camera in motion and our leaving in a more or less of an Indian file was recorded for posterity.

One last look behind. This used to be the place where Doublethink and Newspeak were taught . Not much has changed. Perhaps Doublespeak was the most notable post-communist addition. One thing is certain. To learn Doublethink, Newspeak and Doublespeak as successfully as we see on every Romanian television channel these days, the one and only thing you need is good teachers!

Applying to a university abroad

Alin Ciobanu, XII D

Which way to go after high school? Is a Romanian University a good choice or should I go abroad? Here is some advice for those of you who are considering this path.

I`ve always wanted to apply abroad. The UK, France, The Netherlands, Italy were the places where I was thinking of going. So this is about my experience applying to a Fashion Design Bachelor Degree in a foreign country.

I`m a natural sciences student, so naturally I wanted to study Medicine…up until 11th grade, when I simply changed my mind. Of course, people, including my parents, thought I was backing out of going to Med School because I was somehow afraid I was-n't good enough. That wasn't the case; I simply realized it is not what I want to do for the rest of my life. So, I started researching art universities, visiting fairs dedicated to applying abroad, but I was always left feeling unsure and that there were still questions I had unanswered. The solution to this was going to a counselling company that deals with such things. Not only do they guide you through the application process, which, to be fair is quite draining, but they also have access to certain information you just can`t find online. I have to admit that going to such a company can be quite pricy, but it`s totally worth it, as it makes everything a lot simpler and it makes it feel like it`s not such a big deal.

Drapery study

Typically, for art related programmes, you need to prepare an Art Portfolio, and depending on the country or uni of your choice, you need to prepare a Personal Statement, and provide them with your high school transcript and recommendation letters from your teachers, all translated and legalized. Also depending on the country of your choice, you will either apply through a national platform (for example UCAS in the UK, Studielink in the NL), a platform chosen by the uni or even directly through the university.

After your documents are ready, the application process starts, which for me was the most stressful part. Before you submit your documents I recommend getting a good idea of all the universities and programmes that you`re applying to by searching not only their websites, but chat rooms or online discussions related to the uni or programme. Visiting the place also helps a lot in making the decision, which can easily be done during the interviews that most of the universities have. Needless to say, don't make any hasty decisions and always follow your instincts.

After you submit everything that needs to be submitted the waiting begins. It can take from 2 weeks to 2 months for the universities to reply, but during this time you can focus on school, think about your options, think out a budget for when you`re already gone to uni and all the other details. During this time, you might have interviews, online or real life ones, you may have assignments for the universities etc. When it all ends, you get your offers, conditional or unconditional (if you need a certain grade in the BAC exam), and you have to start thinking about accommodation and all that fun stuff. The cool thing is that you`ll be done before finishing school and the BAC, considering you start your application during the first semester of senior year, while the kids who remain in a local university won't get to enjoy summer as much, as they finish their "application process " mid to end July.

CROW collection

No matter what you choose, make sure it`s what you truly want and start intensely preparing for it, as nothing comes without hard work and determination. I wish you all good luck and hope that everyone gets to follow their dreams, regardless of where you choose to study.
PS: I have already been accepted to 2 universities (KABK- the Hague, ArtEZ- Arnhem) and still waiting for the answer from another 2 (AMFI- Amsterdam, IED-Milan)

Vlogging- the new way to become famous

Mihai Vasilăţeanu, IX F

In the technological era we live in, the internet has increasingly become vital for our work and entertainment. We spend most of our time on useful gadgets doing many kinds of things, and one of the most important is watching the videos of our beloved vloggers - now we are going to talk about them.

Practically, they are the young celebrities of the virtual space; they speak freely and honestly about what they think and feel, using an informal, friendly language, which accounts for their popularity with the teenagers. Compared to a classic TV show, a vlog is generally much shorter and the message and information are directly sent, because people do not always have time and patience to watch, for example, a complex documentary about dolphins, but they are more likely to sacrifice 10 or 20 minutes to watch a vlog and find out what they are interested in. So, they can be the friends with whom we share the same passions and interests, as well as our teachers.

The first video blog was uploaded in the U.S. in 2000, being and alternative to the classic blog, the written one, and since then vlogging has become a bewildering industry. Now, anyone could earn a lot of money from it. If you also want to be a vlogger, you only need a camera, at first, but as you become popular you might have to invest in your virtual business more or less. Many people who have been doing this for many years started in their own room and later on went to have even studios and colleagues helping them with their work.

As a freelance job, it gives you the opportunity to talk about any subject you prefer and do anything you want. The best known vlogger in the world is PewDiePie, with 62 million subscribers. In Romania, the biggest and the first vlogger who has managed to reach the number of 1 million subscribers is Mihai-Alexandru Has. He has become famous for his entertaining videos, and recently he started making reviews. There are also vloggers who discuss about historical events, geographic curiosities, economic activities and other educational things. Others would rather film themselves while doing stunts. Some vloggers even started singing together and released hits which occupied the first position in the top trending songs on YouTube.

In conclusion, with all the liberty and benefits this job offers, why not choose to become a vlogger?

The Bucharest Model NATO Conference

Sânziana Stan, X G

The Bucharest Model NATO Conference is an annual simulation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and this January was the fourth edition. This is actually the first Model NATO Conference in the world.

The organizers are teenagers, just like you, just like me, but who have bold and beautiful dreams that they work hard for.
There were only 160 spots, and four committees (Political Affairs, Nuclear Planning, Military, Emerging Security Challenges and Partnerships and Cooperative Security). Every single person was in a committee and was representing a country. I was in the Nuclear Planning Committee, representing the delegation of Norway.
Every committee had three topics, and you had to do some research on every one of them, to know your country's opinions, your country's position on the topic, in order to have an actual debate with other countries on the matter.

Well, I didn't know all that! So there I was, two days before the conference, all panicked and crying because I didn't know about the research. I kept thinking that if I'd make a mistake, do or say something wrong, it would just prove how big of a failure I truly am. So I sat down (with an ice cream) and started doing my research. I got so into it that I didn't realise what time it was. It was 3 AM. I will probably never forget that morning. I had stayed in front of my laptop for six hours straight, reading about First World Problems, things that actually happen in the world we live in, but that aren't made public enough for everyone to know.

First Day (Thursday, just in case you were wondering)
At first, it was the Opening Ceremony (say whaat??).You arrived at the Palace of Parliament and went through check-in. The organizers had a nice, encouraging speech that really lightened the mood. Last but not least, the key-note speaker: Jose Maria Lopez-Navarro, an actual NATO official, made a speech about the importance of projects like this, about how inspiring teenagers like us are, the teenagers that represent this world's future. (I did tear up a little at his speech, I must admit)
No debates took place that day, it was just a small introduction. It was actually really nice to meet people that were as nervous as I was, people that were behind with their research.

Second Day
Also known as "the hardest day in my life". 9 hours of debate, I repeat, 9 hours of debate. Well yeah, with some coffee breaks (some well deserved breaks, one might say) and a lunch break.
On the second day, we had small debates on the topics that were assigned to each committee, only to reach an understanding in which all countries had to agree on a solution to the problem that was given in the topic. It was really nice going from a formal discussion to an informal one (when we had to find a solution– called resolution- we went from a formal discussion to an informal one). Every time a group finished writing the resolution, they started to applaud. And then the entire room was full of cheers and applause. I can tell you that I don't think I ever once in my life had such a good night sleep after that day.

Third Day
The third day was the crisis day. There was a situation of crisis given and every committee had to find a solution, but we could ask for information if we needed to. It was hard but in those moments, working with other 10 people that are just as desperate as you are, truly beautiful memories were made. When someone cracked a joke just to lighten the mood, we all would just calm down a bit, take a few minutes to brainstorm by ourselves, only to bring a new idea on the table, for all of us to debate, change and make better.
At the end of the day, there was this small get together. It was fun because none of us were wearing any smart-casual-office clothes, so that was a change of setting!

Last Day
This was probably one of the most beautiful, fulfilling days of my entire life. Each committee was reading its resolutions. I had to read out one of the resolution in front of a room full of like 300 people (with volunteers and staff). I can easily say that I was pretty scared.
After the resolutions were read, the awards were given. My friend won the 'Best dressed' award in her committee. I was anxious because I felt like there were no chances for me to actually win something, but at the same time it was quite frustrating knowing how much effort I put into my speeches, my research, knowing how draining it was for me to exceed my own limits. But then, the Best First Time Delegate Award was presented for every committee. And then, I heard my name. I was really confused because I was more than sure that I wouldn't win anything. My friend literally had to push me a little because I couldn't move. For many, this award means nothing. For me it was like all my work was finally noticed and appreciated.
I've learned that when you actually work for something, your work will be seen, it will be appreciated. And we all need that little push in life sometimes. We all need some encouragement.
Even now, remembering it fills my heart with pure joy and excitement for what's to come.

These are the moments that make life beautiful. Being in a room full of strangers just for them to become your friends in the next three days.
These are the moments that you look back to with a smile on your face.
Moments that can't be experienced at home, or at school or in a club.
Moments that can't be taken away.

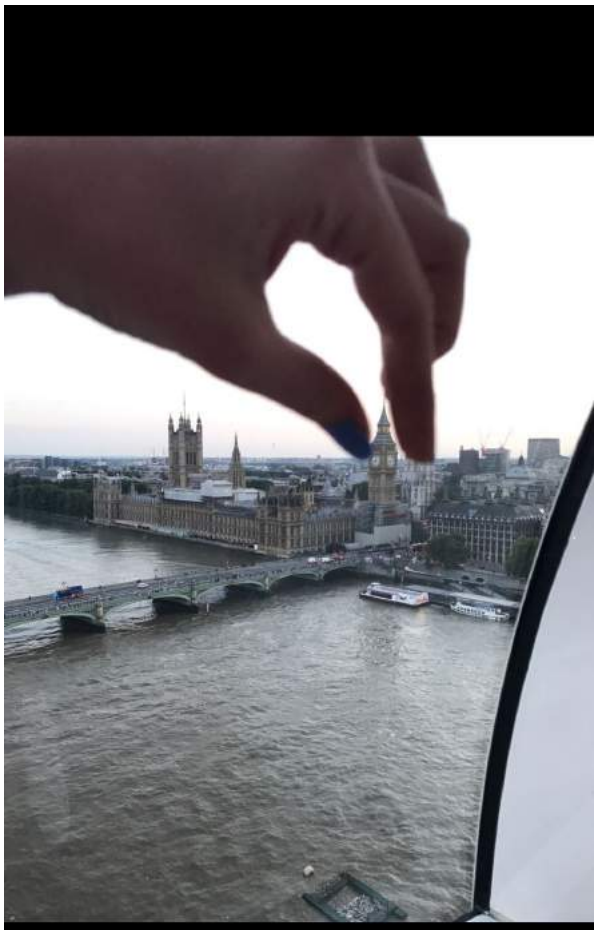
My time in Cambridge and London Campuses

Ioana Iordan, X D

As promised, here comes an account of the time spent studying abroad, in the UK, which I hope will do the wonderful days I stayed there justice.

As soon as I arrived in Cambridge, I stepped into an atmosphere of ambition, where everyone shared big dreams and the wish to overtake their own goals continuously. Arguably, the best part of the entire voyage was being able to share views and opinions with people fundamentally, culturally, and morally different from myself. Late nights were spent in circles playing cards and talking about countless philosophical concepts and exchanging views about our world, society, and ourselves.

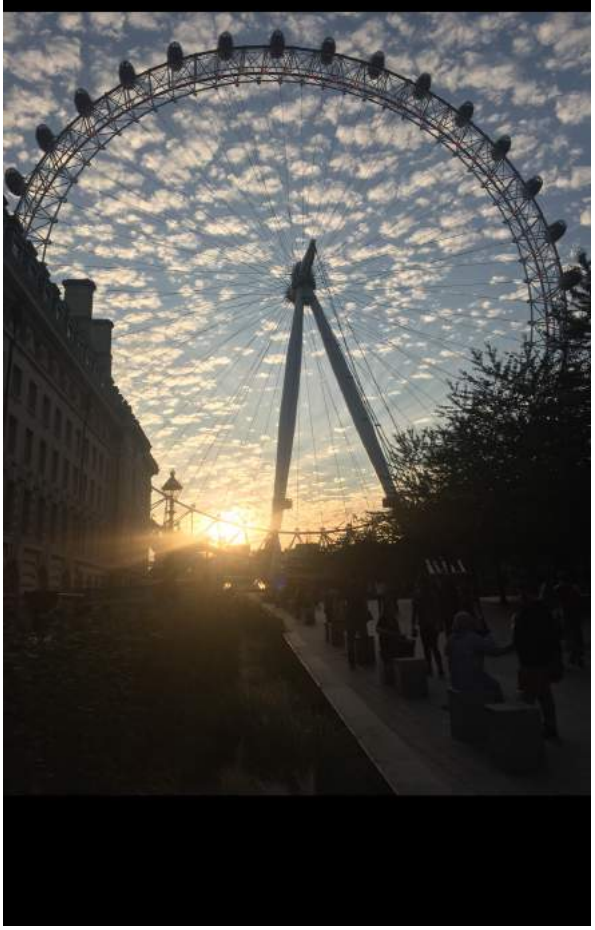
However, studying at both campuses included plenty of work and a strenuous routine that we maintained in order to keep up with the subjects we had signed up to take. Personally, I decided to take Psychology, Media Studies, Maths and Presentations in Cambridge, and I took up Maths and Chemistry, while in London.



Having travelled by myself before, being independent and self-reliant wasn't a new thing for me, but living abroad for two weeks more or less on my own with people my age cultivated my independence and pushed me to grow more self -aware and attentive, among other skills.

The experience had such a positive impact on me that I have applied to join Academic Summer on the other side of the spectrum, as a student leader who could shape the same unique experiences I took part in for other scholars.

To conclude, I wholeheartedly recommend international summer camps, academic or not, as it was a culturally, mentally, and academically enriching experience.



COTROCENI PALACE-THE CROWN JEWEL OF BUCHAREST

Ileana Carmen Dobrescu, X G

The visit to Cotroceni Palace took place in our high school's unique week called "Classes, in a new way". The initial tour started with a visit to the Journalism University, attended by many students. After the first visit, many schoolmates wanted to spend time together so we all decided to have lunch at the mall nearby, Afi Palace. The next visit was to Cotroceni Palace, but unfortunately a big part of the group felt tired, so they went home. The rest of us were feeling like the last of the Mohicans, but we had the wish to see it and learn more about our city's history; although some of us had already seen the outstanding palace and museum, we knew that we could enjoy it even if we were going to visit it a hundred times.

When we arrived, we were amazed by its beauty. It stood out, transforming the atmosphere around us into one of nostalgia. We were welcomed by a kind looking lady with a warm smile on her face, who, we found out immediately, was our guide. She showed us the exterior of the palace, the garden and the church. Everything looked as if it had been taken out of a history book, what we saw was absolutely breathtaking.

As we were observing our surroundings, our guide started to tell us about the palace. We were immediately captivated. Cotroceni Palace enjoys, when compared to all the other palaces in Bucharest, the most consistent historical background. The nowadays palace was built in 1888, by order of King Charles the First, who commissioned Paul Gottereau to build a royal residence, which he successfully did, lending the structure a graceful Classical Venetian style. However, a significant part of the history of Cotroceni Palace goes back earlier than its construction.

Prince Serban Cantacuzino ordered the construction of a religious complex consisting of a monastery, a church and adjoining structures in 1679, the site of his choice being the former Cotroceni Hill. The word "cotroceni " comes from the archaic verb "A SE COTROCI" which means to hide.

Constantin Brancoveanu continued his work mostly because of his religious personality.

Alexandru Ioan Cuza was also drawn to spending the summer season at Cotroceni monastery.

Until the reign of Charles the First, the religious complex had already made way to its transformation into a princely residence. Charles the First also made some changes; he ordered the beginning of the works in 1888. The northern wing of the palace and other structures were added only later, being built by following the designs of Grigore Cerchez.

In the late nineteenth century Cotroceni Palace became the residence of King Ferdinand and Queen Maria.

After the little speech held outside by our gentle guide, we finally started our visit inside the palace.

Cotroceni Palace houses an impressive number of pieces of incomparable beauty, also containing various objects belonging mostly to the ruler and his wife. The most beautiful room, called "The Flower Room", was Queen Maria's idea. At first it was decorated with flowers wrapped in gold leaves, while the floor had the turquoise colour, these two combined making the room look like a swimming pool. Princess Marioara is said to have been afraid to enter this room because she thought she would drown. Even today the curtains spread a bluish atmosphere. In my opinion, the artist wanted to reproduce the Garden of Eden in just one room. The next amazing room was a beautiful library with a collection of over 2500 books. Queen Maria had a great influence over the palace, especially the royal chambers on the private part of Queen Maria's, entirely carved in pine wood. The queen used to think of this as her place to meditate.

In conclusion, if you haven't visited the palace yet then hurry up and do it, and – for our schoolmates who didn't get to see it, they don't know what they missed. Cotroceni Palace was, is and will remain our city's crown jewel.

Albert Ketelbey, British composer- "In a Persian Market"

ONE PIECE OF MUSIC- THREE DIFFERENT STORIES

In this issue, we have used music as the inspirational driving force in our creative writing activities. Much to their delight (and, sometimes, confusion), students were asked to listen to an enchanting symphonic miniature, composed by Albert Ketelbey, a British composer who, during the first decades of the twentieth century, acquired notoriety by writing soundtracks for the first movies, the silent ones. The musical work, suggestively entitled "In a Persian Market", was selected because it is a genuine story in sounds, as it abides by the canons of a prose narrative, if we refer to the succession of moments, rendered by the alternation of movements that convey conflicting moods and its recurring themes.

So, we tried our hand at "translating" music into prose, according to our students' narrative skills, artistic empathy, and inspiration. The outcome was represented by a variety of productions, from among which we have selected the very best three ones.

In a Persian Market (The painting-like, colourful, sense-appealing story)

Duţu Maria, Xth C

The sun's barely passing through the old dusty glass windows of the houses towering the mountain.

The air is cold and bathes the ground in shiny droplets of water. People start getting out of the small lost houses and women wearing strikingly colourful, red, pink, black-striped dresses and hats that hide rebellious black curls make their way upwards, barefoot and carrying baskets on their shoulders. The tingling of their golden bracelets makes their rushed steps sound like bells letting go of the staggering silver moonlight for the fluid sparkling rays of sunshine. They walk their way through narrow, dusty, stone-filled paths towards the top of the mountain.

Here, in the market, the strong smell of cumin, basil, black pepper and mint fills the air along with the giggle of dancing girls.

And there he is. The thief, a young boy with black eyes, who rapidly tiptoes around the corners, behind the sacks full of grains, powerfully grasps a bunch of fruit while a merchandiser is not watching and runs away from the market, hearing the flute melting away behind him. He then lies under a tree on the fine grass and falls asleep after eating the mouth-watering fruit.

In a Persian Market (The absurd & witty, pamphlet-like, dark -humour imbued story)

Andrei Theodoru, Xth C

It was a hot summer day, in the desert. The golden sand was burning the feet of the servants that were travelling along with a nobleman crossing the desert to research the people's habits there. He was accompanied by his daughter, one of the most beautiful girls of all times, as they say. After two days of walking through the scorching desert they were about to reach the town of Yazad, where one of the biggest markets was.

When they got there, the daughter wanted to explore the surroundings, so she asked her father to allow her stroll about the place. He agreed. She was wandering about the long, narrow streets of the market, where everyone was screaming to draw the customers' attention on them, when she came across an old man, with white beard and hair. He looked like the man in a game that gives you a side-quest. He told her that he was selling

an invisibility turban, which was made by the Gods. In the meantime, the Gods were watching the scene:

“This crook is dragging us into this; it can’t be possible!””

“And the worst thing is that we can see they are buying them both, the lies and the turban.”

“We have to do something about it.”

So they made the wind blow, and the turban was almost gushed away. However, the old man, his mind on the money which would come from selling the turban, was more willing to lose his life, rather than the turban. The gods frowned. How can this be?! Someone was selling fake magic stuff on their behalf. If they had wanted to trick people into buying fake magic items, they would have done it themselves, but nooo, there had to be an old man to think of it first.

The most powerful of the gods summoned all the other gods for a meeting. He came up with an idea: “Because we can’t stop the old man from selling the turban from up here, we have to go down to his level. So, literally, does any one of you know how to make an invisibility turban?”

There was total silence in the room.

“Does any one of you know how to make a *fake* invisibility turban?”

The odds fell on a smaller god as no one volunteered. He went down and made a better offer for a similar turban, because that’s how the competitive market of capitalism works. When he saw that she couldn’t make up her mind, he flew into a rage and started shooting laser from his eyes. The girl ran, stealing both turbans and got in the vehicle with her father, then sped away while the town exploded behind them.

The moral: cool guys don’t watch explosions.

The Dash for the Lamp- *creative writing group work*

Irina Codreanu, Ioana Iordan, Antonia Manea, Georgiana Cioranu, Andreea Sevastre (Xth D)

Walking through the town’s bazaar was not an unusual thing for Amir. But sashaying through the colorful drapes and fabrics, the scent of condiments and unique desserts grew ominously more and more enticing.

However, it was not the exotic food and clothes that caught the boy’s eye, but the odd golden artifact lying atop a seller’s shelves. The merchant grew impatient with Amir’s haggling and negotiating, thus refusing to sell it to him for any price.

Despite the inner conflict, he grabbed the lamp and made to leave the market. His attempt to escape was short-lived, as the merchant noticed the stolen decoration and began alerting people. Eventually, Amir overtook all the merchants who tried to catch him. That was, until the royal guards realized the value of the stolen lamp and the reason why it had been stolen in the first place.

They tried to chase the boy, but their efforts were to no avail. The guards couldn’t keep up with Amir in the scrimmage of people. He hid from them in an abandoned house outside the market and took a look at his new possession. The lamp was shiny in his dirty hands and the jewels on it were breathtaking, giving the impression of a tangible colorful rainbow.

Amir thought of his aunt’s stories about the lamp and decided that he couldn’t wait any more to see if any of them were true. His curiosity was eating him alive so he slotted his fingers into the four small indents on the lamp. That moment, the lamp started shaking in his tiny hand and soon enough thick blue smoke enveloped him.

Acknowledgements

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Photographs

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Miruna Căpraru - *4/4 for Friends*
Alin Ciobanu - *Applying to a university abroad*, From his Art Potfolio application
Ioana Iordan - *My time in Cambridge and London Campuses* and third cover

Paintings

Ioana Răducu – *the corpse symphony*
Mirna Murad – *Moon priestess*

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